# Tim Dear, 1934–35 — The Turning Point

## Reflections

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I found this photo yesterday while scanning my grandfather Tim's old high school album. It had been tucked loose in the back, from a slightly later time in his life. Hanging from his arm is his millworker's basket — a small, ordinary thing that quietly marks a turning point.

The picture was most likely taken in late 1934 or early 1935. That fall, Tim was living on Walton Street in Camas, Washington — one block north of Crown Park at the edge of town — and beginning work at the Crown Willamette paper mill.

In the few years leading up to that, at the height of the Great Depression, he and my grandmother Blanche had been moving with the times — she from Normal School at Monmouth to teaching in Wapinitia near Mt. Hood, and Tim raising turkeys around Oakland and Cottage Grove before joining the Civilian Conservation Corps near Diamond Peak, Oregon. I'm still working to pinpoint the exact camp — there are photos.

By 1933 they had a newborn daughter, Mary Alice, and Blanche was living in Gunter, Oregon, on her grandmother Esther Wells Smith's property. It was a rough, refurbished outbuilding — a former chicken shack — but it was shelter. There are numerous photos of baby Mary Alice from that time, playing in the yard with the shack in the background.

All of this was unfolding at the depth of the Depression. Between 1931 and 1934, Oregon's mills were closing, teachers were being laid off, and families were patching farm buildings into makeshift homes. The CCC had just begun offering relief work to young men like Tim — hard labor, but steady pay and three meals a day. Those small wages, sent home each month, likely helped Blanche and the baby through that rough winter of 1933–34.

This photo captures that turning point — when the worst of the Depression still lingered, but a small measure of stability was beginning to return. The jacket he's wearing, short and warm like a bomber's coat, may have been bought with those CCC wages, just before he found steady work at the mill in Camas. It certainly looks like a first-day-of-work photo — possibly taken by his cousin Charles Vail, who was already living and doing photography work in Camas.

Tim's grandmother, **Amanda Vail**, then living in Washougal, had crossed the continent in **1853**. Her wagon party merged with others along the trail — including the **Smith family**, whose train was led by two of the Smith brothers. At *The Dalles*, the families joined other emigrants debating whether to risk the Columbia River passage or take the established Southern Road through Oregon.

That road soon divided again under the lead of **Elijah Elliott**, who promised a shorter, toll-free path into the Willamette Valley — an untested route that became known as the **Elliott Cutoff**. The **Smith–Vail** wagons, along with the **Pittock** family, followed Elliott and that route into the Cascades. The journey turned disastrous and was later remembered as the *Lost Wagon Train of 1853*.

Among the emigrants on that lost train was a young **Henry Pittock**, who arrived in Oregon "shoeless and penniless." In time, he would become the owner of *The Oregonian* newspaper and, decades later, one of the early financiers behind the **Camas paper mill** — the same mill where **Tim (Thurman Eugene) Dear** and **Blanche (Irene Toner) Dear** would later work.

Eight decades later, **Amanda Vail's grandson, Tim**, married **Blanche Toner**, a descendant of the Smith family from that same journey, and found himself working in the very mill Henry Pittock helped to build.

These aren't coincidences. They're the living pulse of history — the **Smiths, Vails, and Pittocks**, once huddled around wagon-train fires in the Cascades, their stories crossing again generations later in the town that rose from those same roots. The paper mill that shaped my family's life was born from the same trail that carried them west. You couldn't script it if you tried — it's the past folding back on itself, finding its way home.